

## Academic Communities and Pedagogical Cultures

(Dr. Birgit Hawelka in conversation with Prof. Dr. Mari Murtonen)

Birgit Hawelka:

Hello and a warm welcome to this podcast series. My name is Birgit Hawelka and joining me today is Mari Murtonen. She is professor of Higher Education Pedagogy and leader of the UTUPEDA-Centre at the University of Turku. Her latest research focuses on collaborative pedagogical practices to support pedagogical competence in the work community. And that is exactly what we want to talk about today. Hello, Mari. Welcome, good to have you here.

Mari Murtonen:

Thank you. It's very nice to be here.

Birgit Hawelka:

So, we all have an idea that being embedded in a supportive community is an important aspect that contributes to pedagogical wellbeing. However, we might differ in our understanding of what this sense of community exactly means. From an academic point of view: What does this sense of community consist of?

Mari Murtonen:

Okay, so of course pedagogical culture can be observed from many angles. But we have divided this question into four topics: One is culture, one is pedagogical support, one is cooperation practices, and one is conscious solutions.

Birgit Hawelka:

Okay, can you tell us a little bit more about these different aspects?

Mari Murtonen:

So, if you think about the nature of pedagogical culture, it means, like, all kind of attitudes towards teaching, are they positive, or negative, or maybe just indifferent, like, there are no clear opinions. Is teaching important or valued or...? There are also some sad misconceptions of teaching and learning in every culture, like, it can be understood as supporting student learning or for example as delivering information, which is not very good for learning.

Birgit Hawelka:

This difference between a student-centered or teacher-centered attitude?

Mari Murtonen:

Exactly. And in addition to the culture that exists in some groups of people, there are many ways to support the pedagogical issues such as pedagogical studies offered by the university or the faculty. And then there are other kinds of encouragement and support systems like supervisors can support PhD students, e.g., that you can go to these pedagogical courses. And this is where you can find them. There are also many kinds of ways that community members can help and support each other. The third aspect, cooperation practices, refers to situations where pedagogical discussions, for example, happen, and how teaching is done together. For example, are teachers preparing teaching together or are there some discussions constantly at the departments, for example. Has there been reserved some time to have pedagogical discussions? Then the fourth one: different kinds of teaching and assessment methods that are used - are these conscious solutions or is it just happening, like, we have always been teaching like this. Then the next ones will also teach in the same way, or are these kinds of solutions made consciously

Birgit Hawelka:

Thanks for giving us this first and interesting framework. And what you investigated more deeply together with some colleagues is the nature of pedagogical culture and its effects on university teachers. From your point of view, what are the most important and interesting results? And maybe especially interesting for us: Can pedagogical training change the pedagogical culture in the community?

Mari Murtonen:

Of course. There is the question that when we are giving, like me and you, pedagogical courses at university, are there some effects? Are they affecting anything? And of course, we aim not only for the individual teacher's development, but also the development of the whole culture. And what we did at the University of Turku was that we were asking our teachers how much all kinds of support they got from their institute and also from their peers. And what we found out was that those teachers who were quite novices, like, they had worked less than four years, many of them reported having peer support from their colleagues like other teachers asking: "How is your teaching and do you need any help with this?" and also, they reported having a pedagogical education. While those teachers who had been working more than twenty years, not many of them only like thirty or forty percent, reported having help, while most of them said that they didn't get any help. So, it was like forty percent of them having help and eighty percent of those younger ones having help. So, on the basis of these results I would say that "Yes." Pedagogical culture has been changing and it has changed for the positive, of teachers giving each other peer support and especially the new teachers who come to the group asking them "Do you need help?" And they are giving them some help.

Birgit Hawelka:

That seems to be a quite encouraging development.

Mari Murtonen:

Yes. And then we did another study where we were interviewing teachers. And we noticed that those teachers, we were actually looking at stress, how stressed the teachers were, and we noticed generally that those who reported more stress had less formal pedagogical education and training and they also reported the absence of dialogue with their colleagues. So, if we look at different teacher groups, we divided the participants into three groups: teachers who were just doing well and had no big stress experiences and those who were experiencing some stress and those who were very stressed. And when we compared these groups, the teachers who had more stress and were kind of, risk of even burn out, they in addition to their experience of an extremely heavy workload, they were self-criticizing themselves a lot, which is very typical for teachers who have no pedagogical training, so they don't kind of trust their own abilities and their own doings. And they also felt that they do not have any help from their colleagues, and they were not offered any official training possibilities from their department or faculty or the whole university.

Birgit Hawelka:

So, to sum up: Training not only improves your expertise, but also your wellbeing. Is that right?

Mari Murtonen:

Yes. Yes, definitely.

Birgit Hawelka:

So, as we learned, pedagogical training and support can influence the sense of community and thereby the lecturer's wellbeing, however not every lecturer takes part in formal trainings and support. Is there anything, the community, the peers can do to support its own pedagogical competence and wellbeing?

Mari Murtonen:

Yes. On the basis of these results that I was telling you about, the two studies and some other studies we have done, I think that the group of the teachers themselves can affect their own wellbeing and the sense of a "good" pedagogical culture, in the way that they are paying attention to things like that; they talk about teaching, and they value teaching and spend some time in developing it. Also offering pedagogical support to each other and strengthening the practices of pedagogical collaboration and also making some informed decisions instead of just, like, continuing the old ways of teaching; those are very important.

Birgit Hawelka:

Could you give us some concrete examples for some of those aspects? For example, some approaches that have been proven or established at Finnish universities, at your university especially?

Mari Murtonen:

Yes, some things that we forced in our courses and asked our teachers to do in practice, are to ask your colleague about teaching. Like, deliberately go to your colleague and ask, “How was your teaching today? Do you want to talk about it?” and also talk about your own teaching, because these collaborative practices with your colleagues are very important in helping to reflect on your own teaching and development. And it’s also a very good idea to visit each other’s classes. So, ask “Can I come to your lesson and give some feedback?” and get it for yourself. I believe that you have the same system.

Birgit Hawelka:

Yes, thank you. For those who are interested: We have the same system, we offer peer supervision and help our participants give good feedback. Those who are interested will find it in an extra article we will link below this podcast.

Mari Murtonen:

I think that it’s very important to give some instructions for this, because if you are not used to giving feedback and getting feedback, it may be a new situation for you. But when you have some aid, with pedagogical instructions, how to do it, like you have, the situation is more, like, comfortable for everyone. And of course, at a group level with a group of teachers, you can do, e.g., what I know that people at Turku University have done: They have, at the faculty level or at the department level, agreed to have some afternoon coffee, for example, where they are discussing, for example, every month some pedagogical topic they have selected. They may have somebody first to speak about the topic and then discuss together. So, deliberately this side to have discussions about pedagogy in addition to discussing your teaching methods and going through your curriculum, like, what kind of pedagogical solutions have been made for each level, but also to foster the discussion, to listen.

Birgit Hawelka:

Discussion of course is a big part of our training, but it should occur even outside the formal training within your workplace.

Mari Murtonen:

Yes, that sounds good.

Birgit Hawelka:

And of course, the communities should not be saddled with all the responsibility. Is there anything the university or the faculties as an institution can contribute to support wellbeing and communality?

Mari Murtonen:

Yes, it’s not only the teachers who can affect this. It’s definitely the whole university and the faculties and departments who can do lots to improve pedagogical culture and practices. Of course, pedagogical studies are one very important thing to offer, like, a formal support for

teachers in their development. And then also things like how to speak about teaching and how the positions are filled, what kind of salaries you have, are affecting how we value teaching. So, valuing is very important. That teachers do know that they are doing some very important work and it affects many, well, all of our students and it's not only their pedagogical courses, but also other kind forms of support, like having good equipment for the teachers. For example, this studio where we are recording: This is very nice. So, all kind of tools and ways to offer teachers to make their teaching better.

Birgit Hawelka:

Okay, Mari. Thank you for taking the time and sharing these really interesting insights. I guess all of us got a good impression that what counts is improving not only training but also communality. Thank you for being here, for having been here, I think I should say. And those of you who want to dive deeper in this topic can find some useful links in the description box below. Mari chose some quite interesting articles about this topic. Thank you so much.

Mari Murtonen:

Thank you. It has been a pleasure to be here and see your wonderful university. Thank you.